

# ITALIAN CINEMA'S MISSING CHILDREN (1992–2005)

Submitted by

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to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Italian,  
January 2012.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work  
has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted and approved  
for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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## THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the University of Exeter and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for generously supporting this doctoral research project. I am grateful, too, to the staff of the Cineteca di Bologna and the Videoteca Pasinetti in Venice, for their unfailing assistance during an extended period of profitable archival research.

Within the field of Italian Cultural Studies (and Film/Cinema) Studies, inspiring and thought-provoking studies by the following scholars proved indispensable to the intellectual development of this project as a whole: Emma Wilson, Áine O’Healy, Danielle Hipkins, Catherine O’Rawe, Derek Duncan, Alan O’Leary, Fiona Handyside and Karen Lury. Thank you for thinking so beautifully and for pushing me to think harder, even when I really didn’t want to. Likewise, working on the cinema of Gianni Amelio, Mario Martone and Antonio Capuano, in particular, has been a great privilege. All of the films I discuss here, are close to my heart, and always will be.

I am also grateful for the numerous gestures of kindness and encouragement by those friends, new and old, who at different points along the way, really helped to keep this show on the road. In particular, I would like to thank: Tom Knowles, Mark Hughes, Rachel Trevallion, Alice Barnaby and Clara Bradbury-Rance, Alexander Cattell, Alwyn Harrison, Colin Dart, Ihere Broden-Miller, Silvia Vázquez Fernández, Antonella Liuzzo-Scorpo, Christine Walters, Barbara Langley, Fiona Handyside, Sally Penna-Bray, Neel Sood, Duncan and Annie Chave, Jenni Lehtinen, Jennifer Barnes, Chloe Bardolf-Smith, Steph and Jeremy, Emilie Grand-Clement, Lewis Ward, Rupa Chilvers, Jenny Ramell, Julie Bladon, Kevin Jefferies and other musical brothers and sisters, Valentina Polcini, my cousin, Chris Hughes, and everyone at BTP. Last but not least, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Sally Turner for her love and incredible kindness during the final, though, no less crucial (or challenging) moments of this journey. I will get my weekends back soon, I promise!

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my doctoral supervisor, Dr Danielle Hipkins. Your care, diligence and patience, never ceases to amaze me. Thank you for being a truly incredible supervisor, mentor and friend. I most certainly could not have done this without you. Namaste.

This PhD is dedicated to my wonderful and inspiring mother, Lesley Pitt, my great friend and grandfather, Graham White, and to the memory of my cherished grandmother, Elsie White. You were by my side every step of the way and you continued to believe in me even when the chips were well and truly down. For this, I cannot thank you enough.

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this doctoral thesis is to analyse the range of resonances surrounding the lost or endangered child (or adolescent) in six Italian films made between 1992 and 2005. By drawing on and expanding Emma Wilson's proposed understanding of the term 'missing child' in *Cinema's Missing Children* (a transnational, cinema-based study published in 2003), this thesis will seek to open out new ways of exploring both contemporary Italian cinema and the 'missing child' paradigm. To this end, the following research questions are pivotal to the discursive trajectory of this thesis as a whole: What does it mean to ground contemporary Italian works which broadly correspond to the term 'missing child' (as proposed in *Cinema's Missing Children*) within the specific context of Italian culture and society? How would recourse to a range of specifically Italian filmmaking, socio-cultural, or historical phenomena shape (or reshape) our understanding of this *topos*?

In order to fully engage these concerns, this thesis will begin by establishing a rigorous interdisciplinary methodology. In Chapter One, I will address questions of critical reception with particular emphasis on the possible pitfalls of conventional recourse to neorealism as a means of reading the missing child in contemporary cinema. In Chapter Two, I will extend this necessary emphasis on critical reception and related notions of possible distortion and oversimplification, to include the dialogic relation between Italian cinematic articulations of (missing) children, childhoods and the experience of (biological and non-biological) parenthood, and clusters of cultural and political concerns and anxieties. In chapters Three, Four, and Five, I will bring this interdisciplinary methodology to bear on three sets of primary sources. Whilst this close textual analysis will contend with the missing male child (in a range of guises), it will also bring to the fore new ways of thinking with and about the critically neglected female child. By moving away from more normative critical frameworks (including neorealism) this thesis will not only attempt to reset and refresh understandings of important works of the last two decades, but will also work towards a recuperation of the critically disavowed gender identity (and concomitant role and status) of 'missing' female children.

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